Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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OUR WORK.

House of Education Natural History Club—Notes by M. L. Hodgson.—On giving you a few notes on the third division of our subject, Ants, I must begin by mentioning the name of Sir John Lubbock with a short account of some of the things he has to tell us about them. No creature has ever been more carefully watched, commented on, and studied. "*Ants, Bees and Wasps*," by Sir John Lubbock contains all I suppose that is accurately known on the subject of Ants, and I recommend you to make a note of the book, and procure it for yourselves whenever you have the opportunity. Here we have the records and notes of a study in nature covering a period of many years. One nest in particular, we are told was first placed under observation in 1874, eight years after some of the ants were alive and well in 1888, being then probably more than 15 years old. Your Nature Note Books may never contain such valuable information as Sir John places on record, but they may do very useful work nevertheless. The amazing patience which records the doings of these minute creatures hour by hour, and often minute by minute is a lesson to all of us. I wish I had time to tell you of the many experiments tried over and over again, in order to test the intelligence, courage, or perseverance of ants. The ingenious arrangements for observing them; the way in which it is proved that they can distinguish colours, and their highly developed sense of smell, all these things are so well and delightfully told us that I cannot find words of my own to say anything about them, and feel as if I must give you whole pages from the book itself.

In this country we have more than thirty kinds of ants, so that if you wish to start observing them at any time, they will afford you plenty of scope for work as we are told there are no two kinds "identical in their habits." They pass through the stages of egg, larva, pupa, perfect insect. Their bodies are arranged into head, thorax, abdomen. Their food consists of insects, honey-dew, fruit, etc , and as I have no doubt you know for yourselves, if once a nest gets established near a cupboard where sweet things are kept, nothing is safe from them I have seen a bowl of white sifted sugar perfectly black with ants. The aphis or ant's cow has two projecting horn-like appendages on the upper part of the end of its abdomen, if you watch a rose tree that is infested with green-fly *(aphides)* you will see the ants for yourselves running up and down and tapping the backs of the aphides with their antennæ, in order to induce them to extrude the minute drops of honey-dew they are in search of. Some species of ants have adopted the habit of making slaves of some of their black relations, and there are cases where the ants that are used

to being waited on by these attendants have become totally dependent on them, and if deprived of their slaves they die. It is impossible to satisfactorily condense this large subject into one lesson, so I intend to give a further lesson next week in order to give you some account of our common species of ants. No doubt you have seen for yourselves a piece of common or waste land covered with large firm mounds; if you had looked carefully you might have seen the workers on a fine day carrying out the pupa or eggs for an airing, and if you had disturbed the top of the nest the commotion would perhaps have surprised you.

I once watched some of the large red ants that one often sees in France, but I do not remember ever seeing them in England. They had a huge nest by the road-side, which was made of thousands of bits of stick and straws, at least it seemed so, only I dare not interfere with it on account of the huge size of the creatures; they were however very busy carrying them about, and the way they held up their heads so that they were not inconvenienced by the stick was very funny. Two of these creatures had found a dead beetle, too large even for them, and they were for some time trying to get it up the steep bank; they failed, but as I watched, I saw first one and then another ant join them, until with three or four pulling above and three or four pushing below the beetle was secured. It was a very funny sight to see the creatures at work—a sort of tug-of-war on a small scale. You have no doubt noticed the well marked roads leading to the nests, it is very often beautifully marked out across a gravel walk, quite a clean well swept little path, and if you put a few small stones or bits of stick on it you will soon find them carefully cleared away. I shall be quite satisfied if I can only succeed in drawing your attention to what you may find out for yourselves on this delightful subject. I can assure you it has given me much pleasure many a time. Don't think that small ants are young ones, for remember, insects never grow when once they are "*perfect insects*." I will say more later on about the winged stage, as I have been expecting a question on that before this, as I am sure you must have seen winged ants.

House of Education—The Lady Visitor, Mrs. Dallas Yorke, paid her annual visit to the House (June 7th—9th). The students taught before her. She looked at the various handiworks, bookbinding, basket work, etc.; saw the ball and other drills; heard language lessons on the Gouin method, and generally, went into the working of the College. Mrs. Dallas Yorke's visit was a source of very great pleasure to both students and teachers. Her sympathy and comprehension of the aims and methods, and her inspiring words have given most welcome stimulus to the work. Ladies who wish for Probationers for the summer holidays should write at once.

Parents' Review School.—The examination papers will be sent out in the second week of this month. The Summer Examination is only for the satisfaction of parents. Reports should be sent in but not the children's work.